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*John* iii. 8.

BY PROF. J. F. GENUING, PH.D.

IN the interpretation of this passage, commentators have always been predominantly, and as I think unduly, influenced by the fact that the Greek word *πνεῦμα* means both *spirit* and *wind*. As a consequence they have felt obliged to assume as unquestionable that the one meaning must be taken to illustrate the other; that therefore the wind, in the characteristics here mentioned, must be supposed to illustrate the free unembodied spirit, which for this purpose is conceived of in a semi-materialistic light, as something coursing through the world, working mysteriously upon men, and giving impulses whose origin and tendency no one can understand. This interpretation also necessitates that the last clause of the verse should be twisted a little from its straightforward meaning; so that what says plainly, "So is every one that is born of the Spirit" should be read, "So *it is with* every one that is born of the Spirit."

Now suppose that instead of this we take the passage just as it reads, and assume that the wind is an illustration of him who is born of the Spirit, or, what comes to the same thing, of the spiritual life in regenerate man. The life of the spiritually born is like the wind — how?

1. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." So far as we can see it is self-directive; we can trace no power or mechanism moving it from without. So also the spiritual life has a freedom and a wisdom of its own, which, so far as an outsider can judge, is self-originated and self-guided. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." 2 Corinthians iii. 17.

2. "And thou hearest the sound thereof." The reality and genuineness of the spiritual life, as of the wind, are palpable to every one, from its effects. But whom does our Lord mean here when he says, "*Thou* hearest"? The common interpretation takes *thou* to mean any one; and so far as regards our relation to the wind, this is true. But I think that here it means any one not born of the Spirit; and Nicodemus, to whom Jesus is speaking, is addressed as the type of such. Thou, who art unspiritual, hearest, perceivest the working, but canst not understand.

3. "But canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." The same meaning of *thou* comes over from the preceding clauses:

no one can stand outside of the spiritual life and understand its origin and its tendency. It is all a mystery to the unregenerate. For this truth there are numerous parallel passages ; see especially 1 Corinthians ii. 11, 14.

Here, however, we must make an adjustment with the common interpretation. As we now read it, the passage only says the unregenerate cannot judge the spiritual life ; whereas it has always been understood to mean that no one, not even the regenerate man himself, can tell of the Spirit "whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." The question naturally rises therefore : If this is spoken only of the unregenerate, may not, on the other hand, the regenerate *know* the mystery of his spiritual life ? I think a moment's consideration will make us hesitate to assert that he does not. We certainly understand this much, that our new life comes from God and tends to God ; and such passages as 1 Corinthians ii. 10-16 ascribe much greater insight than this to the spiritual man. But I think also, the present passage implies the same in the antithesis, hitherto not sufficiently regarded, between *you* and *us*. As soon as He has said "thou hearest . . . but canst not tell whence and whither," and received Nicodemus's bewildered question, our Lord says, "*We* speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen ; and *ye* receive not our testimony." Whom does He mean here by *we* ? A great many conjectures have been made ; but it seems to me perfectly clear that He is speaking for all who are born of the Spirit, whom He identifies with himself. We, who are of the kingdom of Heaven, can speak of heavenly things from knowledge ; we know whence our spiritual life comes and whither it tends : ye, who are yet of the earth, cannot understand these things ; they are only hearsay and wonder to you.

This whole passage then, from verse 5 to 11, is in large part a contrast between *you* — Nicodemus, and such as he — who are unspiritual, who cannot know, and *us* — Christ, and all who are his — to whom is made known the mystery of the kingdom of God. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man."